Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

POVERTY BAROMETER

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RECREATION IS A RIGHT...NOT A PRIVILEGE

Some kids don't have the opportunity to develop their potential

Every child has the right to play, but for families living in poverty, it is often difficult to find the resources to ensure that their children have the opportunity to participate in the arts, sports, and other developmentally enriching activities.

Photo courtesty of Rossbrook House

RECREATION IS SO MUCH MORE THAN SPORTS!

Recreational activities include sports and physical recreation programs as well as artistic, creative, cultural, social and intellectual activities.

Recreation is a fundamental human need for people of all ages and interests. It is essential to everyone's psychological, social and physical well-being.

Participation is one of the main stimuli for learning.

WHY CHILDREN AND YOUTH DO NOT PARTICIPATE

A research study commissioned jointly by the Inter-Provincial Sport and Recreation Council, Health Canada, and the Canadian Parks/Recreation Association found that any one, or a combination of the following constraints lead to disinterest in, or barriers to becoming involved in recreational activities.

- High cost of programs
- Lack of accessible transportation
- Lack of information on available programs
- Inflexible program structures such as rigid rules and regulations, controlled sports leagues, and group activity discourage universal participation
- Unsafe neighbourhoods and facilities
- Lack of parks, playgrounds, and green spaces
- Class and racial discrimination
- Lack of family/parental support

Source: "Impact and Benefits of Physical Activity and Recreation on Canadian Youth-at-risk," Canadian Parks/Recreation Association.

Recreation is a *RIGHT* not a Privilege!

Regardless of socio-economic status, every child has the right to participate in recreational activities. Recreation is a public service in the same way that health and education are public services.

Participation in recreation contributes to a well-balanced, healthy, and physically active childhood. The benefits of recreation include:

- Improved physical health with lifelong benefits;
- Improved self-esteem, life satisfaction, and life skills for independent living;
- Positive peer influence and support; and
- Stronger families and healthier communities.

Sorce: Toronto Report Card on Children, 1999.

Recreation Builds Healthy Children

Participation in extracurricular activities lowers the rate of early school dropout, especially among at-risk students.[1]

Children who participate in the arts are one-third less likely to have one or more social or emotional problem, compared to children who do not participate in such activities.[2]

Between 2000-2001, the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs surveyed its members and found that participation in an inner city Boys and Girls Club resulted in a considerable reduction of gang activity among Club members.

Footnotes:

[1] "Do Extracurricular activities protect against early school dropout?" by J.L. Mahoney and R.B. Cairns, 1997. As cited in "Which Children Don't Participate in Sports, the Arts, and Community Programs?" by David Offord, Ellen Lipman and Eric K. Daku.

[2] "Income and Child Well-being: A New Perspective on the Poverty Debate." Canadian Council on Social Development.

"The Y has given my son health and social benefits, and a safe place to go and do wholesome activities. It has benefited us as a family because it is something we can do together."

- Anonymous survey participant: Source: "Mothers Health and Access to Recreation Activities for Children in Low-Income Families." Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence.

Healthy Children Build Healthy Communities

Two studies funded by Health Canada and the Hamilton Community Foundation found that:

- Recreation pays for itself through reduced use of social and health services and through reduced criminal activity such as vandalism and unlawful conduct.
- The impact of providing recreational services resulted in a 10% greater exit from social assistance compared to parents of children who did not receive this service.
- Mothers reported that their children were more positive, less anxious and depressed, and felt better about themselves.

Note: The research was conducted by the Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk at McMaster University in partnership with the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington and the Regional Municipalities of Hamilton-Wentworth and Halton. The findings were published in two studies titled "When the Bough Breaks" and "Benefiting All the Beneficiaries," 1995-1999.

Source: "Scientific Research Supports Recreation for Children Living in Poverty," by Scott Haldane.

The *REAL* cost of recreation

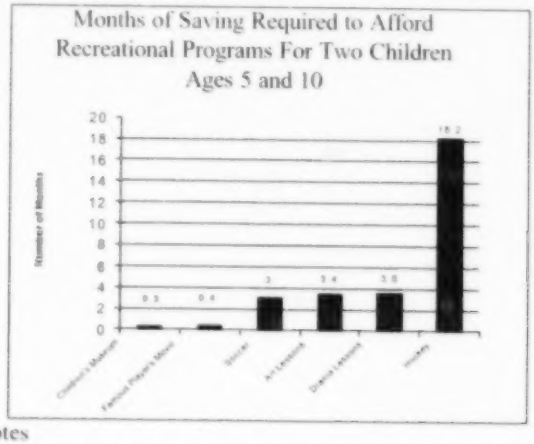
The Social Assistance Budget, including federal benefits[3] for a single parent with two children, ages 5 and 10 provides $1,426 per month to meet all living expenses. The Manitoba Agriculture and Food 2001 Family Living Costs Guide indicates that a family of this size should spend $1,364 on food, shelter, clothing and other basic necessities such as a communication and transportation costs. On this budget, a family has only $62 to cover additional costs such as child care, health care, personal care, household operation, emergencies, and recreation.

This is not enough to pay for many recreational programs in Winnipeg. For example, to register two children, ages 5 and 10 in art classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, a single parent must pay $213 for ten classes. Registration and equipment costs for hockey for a 5 and 10 year old would cost approximately $1,127.12. The high cost of recreational programs combined with insufficient social assistance rates makes it nearly impossible for many children to participate.

To ensure their children can participate in those recreational activities that children in middle and upper income families have come to expect, families living on social assistance must redirect money budgeted for their basic needs to cover the cost of recreation. Families are often forced to choose between buying healthy foods and taking an art class or going to the museum.

BUT, recreation is a vital component of healthy child development and all children deserve the opportunity to develop their potential

The graph below shows how long a single parent with two children ages 5 and 10 must save in order for the children to participate in a recreational program.



Notes

1. Data derived from the Manitoba Agriculture and Food Budget Guides 2001.
2. Social Assistance budgets as prescribed by Manitoba Family Services and Housing for a single parent with 2 children ages 5 and 10.
3. Hockey and Soccer costs were derived from data from the General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres. Equipment costs are based on competitive prices in the city of Winnipeg.
4. The cost of art lessons is based on the current cost of lessons at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.
5. The cost of drama lessons is based on the current cost of lessons at the Prairie Theatre Exchange.

How do Parents afford Recreation Programs?

Forty-nine Winnipeg women living below the LICO[4] were asked to describe how they budgeted for their children's recreational activities. Some of their responses were:

- *We were taking money out of the food budget in order to go to the Y. There is no help.*
- *[I] Eat one meal a day, and cut [my] food budget in order that my child could go on a school outing.*
- *We don't buy meat.*
- *We don't buy clothes, my son did not have any pants without holes to start school in.*
- *[I] Turn the heat down.*
- *I asked someone to pay a registration fee for my son, instead of getting me a birthday present.*

Footnote:

[3] Federal Benefits include the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the NCB Supplement, and the GST Credit.

[4] Campaign 2000 and other reporting on poverty most frequently use the pre-tax Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off. While Canada has no official poverty line, Statistics Canada has noted that the LICO is a consistent way of identifying those who are "substantially worse off than average." A family at or below the LICO is one that spends more than 55% of its pre-tax income on food, shelter and clothing.

Source: The Survey was funded by the Pririe Women's Health Centre of Excellence

The RESULT: Fewer Children are able to Participate in Recreational Activities

Children living in families with incomes below the LICO are significantly less likely to participate in organized sports with a coach once a week or more (37.1% versus 59.1%).

Children living in families with incomes below the LICO are significantly less likely to participate in dance, gymnastics, and in art/music/drama lessons.

What can Government do?

All three levels of government have a responsibility to ensure accessible recreational programs for children and youth. This must be reflected through enhanced government fiscal commitment.

The **Government of Canada** must commit to a 50% reduction in the depth and level of child poverty over the next five years through improved child benefits for all low, modest and middle income families by consolidating the Canada Child Tax Benefit into a single program that provides a maximum benefit of up to $4,200 per child to families independent of their source of income.

The **Manitoba government** must recognize the high cost of many recreational programs and increase the Social Assistance Budget to provide a minimum of $150 per child to cover the costs of such programs.

The **City of Winnipeg's** subsidy/waiver program must be well publicized and centrally administrated to enhance accessibility of recreational programming, while securing confidentiality for families who require assistance.

What needs to be done?

Programs must be **ACCESSIBLE** to children in terms of **schedule, location,** and **cost**. Programs must be available on a regular schedule and over the long-term to provide a reliable home away from home. Programs must be free or very low-cost. Transportation must be provided to ensure youth have safe and affordable access to programs and special activities.

Quality community-based recreation programs[4] that currently provide accessible programming must be funded in a sustainable way so as to maintain and expand their level of services.

Every community should have good parks, playgrounds and green spaces where children can play in a safe environment.

To encourage universal participation in recreation, children must be provided with flexible program structures and a variety of options, including active and passive participation, individual and group involvement, sport and non-sport activities, and indoor and outdoor settings.

[4]The Coalition of Community Based Youth Serving Agencies has developed a best practices document based on research and experience. For more information on accessible program options, please contact Lisa Rosin, Coordinator of the Coalition of community-based youth serving agencies at ph#. 982-4950.

Poverty Barometer is an occasional publication of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

The mission of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg is to provide action-orientated leadership in social planning and effective social policy changes

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